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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

11 October 1951

SUBJECT: NIE-42: THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA WITH PARTICULAR
REFERENCE TO GREEK, YUGOSLAV AND ITALIAN
INTERESTS AND PRETENSIONS (Draft for Board
Consideration)

THE PROBLEM

To examine the current Albanian situation, to analyze the character and extent of Greek, Italian and Yugoslav interests and pretensions in Albania, and to estimate the degree to which these interests conflict, to assess the strategic importance of Albania, and to assess the significance of conflicting interests as obstacles to the effective defense of Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The present regime in Albania is firmly pro-Stalinist, and its control of the armed forces and security forces appears adequate to maintain the regime in power.

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2. Dissatisfaction with the Hoxha regime is widespread and has manifested itself in some overt resistance. The effectiveness of such resistance has been limited, largely because of the lack of coordination both among resistance groups within Albania and among the emigre organizations in Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece.

3. Despite the stability of the Hoxha regime, Albania constitutes a problem of current importance in the Eastern Mediterranean. Its strategic location is such that the national interests of Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece are involved in the ultimate settlement of the Albanian problem. Under present circumstances, rivalry, distrusts and suspicion among the three countries militate against the development of coordinated defense efforts in southeastern Europe.

4. There is little possibility that the rivalry between Albania's neighbors can be ended without the intervention of the Western powers. So long as this rivalry persists, not only will the possibility of effective military cooperation between Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece be limited, but also the possibility of successful resistance within Albania will remain slight.

5. Assurances by the Western powers that Albania would be established as an independent and sovereign state after the fall of the present regime might reduce the rivalry between Italy and Yugoslavia. Such a solution would not satisfy Greek interests,

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but Greece might be induced to agree in return for compensation elsewhere.

DISCUSSION

THE CURRENT SITUATION IN ALBANIA

The Stability of the Regime and Extent of Soviet Control

6. Prior to the Cominform-Yugoslav rift in June 1948, Albania had been closely tied, both politically and economically, to Yugoslavia. Rather than follow Marshal Tito's heresy, however, Hoxha chose the Moscow camp and launched a vigorous campaign for the elimination of "nationalist" elements in Albania. Hoxha not only skillfully extricated Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia, emphasizing his loyalty to Moscow, but also removed any serious competition for leadership within Albania. Although there are reports of rivalry between Hoxha and the present Minister of Interior, Lt. Gen. Mehmet Shehu, the former apparently enjoys the favor of the Kremlin, and Shehu, Moscow-trained but undistinguished as a politician, appears to have little chance of supplanting Hoxha.

7. Moscow, for its part, has recognized the importance of Albania as a pro-Stalinist outpost in the Mediterranean area.

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Following the Tito-Cominform rift, the USSR increased its aid and support to the Hoxha government, replacing the support formerly received from Yugoslavia.

8. Albania is dependent upon Soviet economic support. Without it, the country's economy would probably collapse within a few months. In addition to the control with which this situation provides the USSR, an estimated 1,000 Soviet military and civilian "experts" hold key positions in the police, military, and civilian administrations as well as in the party hierarchy.

9. Soviet control of Albania is thus assured and the native leadership of Hoxha and Shkëmbi has thus far succeeded in controlling the country through the usual Communist methods of police terror and rigid economic controls. The leadership of the armed forces and the majority of the security forces are loyal to the party and constitute an effective force for the suppression of opposition.

Resistance to the Present regime.

10. Dissatisfaction among the Albanian people is widespread, however, and there has been some overt resistance within the past few years. The regime itself has admitted the existence of "diversionist" elements, particularly among the peasantry, and has admitted attacks upon military and civilian supply convoys. The most dramatic incident of resistance activity was the bombing of

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the Soviet Legation in February 1951; however, economic sabotage and local assassinations have probably been more effective in challenging Communist authority. Such activities have, on the whole, been of limited effectiveness and the authorities have adjusted their repressive measures to the situation. For example, Shehu has organized special pursuit battalions which operate in the mountainous areas against individual resistance groups.

11. Refugees have reported the existence of various local rebel groups, such as the "National League of the Mountains," "Liberty," "Skanderbeg,"^{1/} "Call" and "National Unity", but specific information regarding these groups is lacking. There does not appear to be any established cooperation among the various dissident groups despite their common desire to rid Albania of the Hoxha regime.

12. Of the Albanian emigre movements active in resistance measures, the Committee for a Free Albania, an affiliate of the National Committee for a Free Europe, with operational headquarters in Rome probably has most influence with resistance groups within Albania. The Committee's activities within Albania have, of necessity been limited to propaganda work and some subversive

^{1/} The name of an Albanian national hero of the 16th Century.

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activity by agents. Its most effective operation thus far has been the dropping of propaganda leaflets over Albania. The leaflets caused considerable excitement within the country, prompting a note of protest to the Italian government, and encouraging numerous Albanians to flee Albania with the hope of joining the Committee in its struggle against the Hoxha regime. Three groups make up the Committee: (1) the National Agrarian Democratic Party Balli Kombetar (National Front) which has the strongest following in southern Albania, (2) the Legality Party (pro-King Zog) which is strongest in central Albania, and (3) the League of Peasants and Villagers which has the strongest following in the extreme north and in the neighboring Yugoslav provinces inhabited largely by Albanians.

13. In addition to the Committee for a free Albania, there is in Italy a party known as the National Independent Bloc made up of pro-Italian Albanians. This group cooperated with Italy before and during the war and it enjoys the support of the present Italian government;

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14. Of particular current interest is the recently created League of Albanian Political Refugees in Yugoslavia claiming to represent some 5,000 Albanian refugees. The League is composed largely of Albanian Communists who have fled from Albania since 1948, and was created by Belgrade as an instrument of Yugoslav policy, despite its proclaimed objective of "an independent, free, indivisible, democratic and republican" Albania. The League has already engaged in some espionage, sabotage and propaganda activity, and possess a considerable potential for more extensive operations. Yugoslavia's exposed position, however, has probably deterred Tito from using the League to the full.

15. In Greece, most of the Albanian refugees are from southern Albania (Northern Epirus), which Greece claims, and their activities are aimed at eventual Greek annexation of that area. Their efforts have, therefore, been largely in the field of espionage, propaganda and encouragement of additional refugees.

16. Thus, in addition to the local resistance groups, there are operating within Albania agents of four major refugee organizations: the Committee for a Free Albania and the pro-Italian, pro-Greek, and pro-Yugoslav organizations. Their activities are uncoordinated and their objectives frequently conflict. These factors, plus the lack of cooperation among the local groups, has considerably simplified the task of the Albanian security forces in isolating

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and destroying individual groups.

17. Under present circumstances, resistance activity constitutes a troublesome problem for the Hoxha regime, but is not an immediate threat to the regime. As long as the resistance effort is diffused and does not receive substantial external aid, the Albanian security forces will probably succeed in containing the problem.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ALBANIA

18. Despite the fact the prospects for the overthrow of the Hoxha regime in the near future are not promising, Albania nevertheless constitutes a problem of current importance in the Eastern Mediterranean. This arises particularly out of Albania's strategic location on the Adriatic. Naval forces based on Saseno Island and the port of Valona, for example, could threaten control of the Adriatic. For the Soviet Union, Albania, although an exposed outpost, represents an advance base which, if developed, could be used for Soviet air and naval forces in the Mediterranean. Saseno Island was, in fact, an Italian submarine base and there have been recurrent but unconfirmed rumors in the post war years of Soviet efforts to reconstruct these facilities. Also, there is no confirmed evidence of Soviet efforts to build up Albanian air facilities, a step which would greatly enhance Soviet air power in the Mediterranean.

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19. In the event of war in the Balkans, Albania could play an important role in Soviet or Satellite strategy. Not only does it provide an advance base on the Adriatic, but if forces from Bulgaria and Albania could effect a juncture in the narrow portion of Yugoslavia north of the Greek border,^{1/} Yugoslavia would be completely cut off from Greece. If in addition, adequate naval and air forces (presumably Soviet) were available to achieve command of the Straits of Otranto, the Adriatic could be closed as a line of supply to Yugoslavia. Any significant strengthening of military facilities in Albania might well be a prelude to possible Soviet/Satellite action against Yugoslavia.

20. The USSR, apparently in a desire to leave the situation fluid and to avoid a potentially embarrassing commitment, has failed to conclude a mutual assistance pact with Albania.^{2/} In fact, Albania has such a pact only with Bulgaria (16 December 1947). This lack of Soviet or Satellite commitments to Albania should not be interpreted as indicative of lack of interest or concern; it is rather a matter of expediency.

^{1/} The distance between Bulgaria and Albania in this area is less than 125 miles.

^{2/} Other Satellites which have not concluded mutual assistance pacts with the USSR are Eastern Germany and North Korea.

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CONFLICTING INTERESTS OF ITALY, YUGOSLAVIA AND GREECE

21. Albania is an object of concern to its neighbors largely because of its commanding position on the Adriatic coast. Their interests conflict to such an extent that, even under present circumstances, the problem of Albania complicates the development of good relations and cooperation among Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece. Complete cooperation in military planning by these countries would be highly desirable for the effective defense of southeastern Europe. No such steps are currently being taken, although there have recently been vague indications that Greece and Yugoslavia might be willing to exchange vital defense information under certain circumstances. There are, of course, problems other than that of Albania, some of them, such as Trieste, of greater importance, which militate against the development of cooperative defensive efforts, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.

Italian interests.

22. Italy's interest in Albania has always been primarily strategic: to prevent any other power from dominating the Adriatic, and if possible to ensure Italian domination, through control of the Albanian coast. In pursuit of this objective, Italy supported the creation of an independent Albania in 1912

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and later, in 1914, occupied the island of Saseno and the port of Valona on the mainland. Italian troops remained in occupation until 1920. Italy was then forced to evacuate the mainland, but retained Saseno which was converted into a strong naval and submarine base. In 1921, the Conference of Ambassadors (Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan) signed an agreement giving Italy a virtual protectorate over Albania. Italian influence was manifested by loans, Italian management of nearly all important economic enterprises, and Italian training and equipping of the armed forces. In 1939, Mussolini united Albania with Italy, and in 1940, launched his invasion of Greece from there.

23. Under the Italian Peace Treaty (1947), Italy recognized the independence of Albania, ceded Saseno island, and renounced all public and private property rights, concessions, claims, etc. in Albania.

24. Italian policy towards Albania since the end of the war has been directed at a dual objective: the denial of the area to other powers and the restoration of Italian economic and political influence in Albania. In its official statements, the Italian Foreign Office has emphasized that continued Albanian independence and territorial integrity correspond with Italian interests, but Italian efforts to improve relations have made no progress with the present Communist regime. An Italian mission was sent to

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Albania soon after the war to examine questions of interest to both countries, but was soon asked to leave. Diplomatic relations are re-established in 1949 and, despite Communist restrictions on the Italian Legation in Tirana, Italy undoubtedly intends to retain such relations.

25. Under present circumstances, Italian policy is of necessity directed toward the future, and Italy hopes to re-establish its influence through the pro-Italian exile group, the National Independent Bloc.) Italy is particularly apprehensive of possible Yugoslav pre-eminence in Albania in the event the Hoxha regime should be overthrown. Italian strategic interests in Albania are sufficiently great and its desire to avoid the establishment of a foothold by any other power in Albania is sufficiently strong that Italy probably prefers continuation of the status quo to the creation of a power vacuum into which Yugoslavia and, possibly Greece, could move.

Greek interests

26. Greek interests in Albania center around Greek claims to southern Albania (Northern Epirus), an area which the Greeks occupied from 1912 to 1916 and which they have consistently claimed on historical, ethnic, strategic and economic grounds. The Greeks also are acutely aware that Albania served as a base for the Italian attack on Greece in 1940 and, in the post war years, for guerrilla

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operations against Greece. Even at present, Albania is the major base from which Communist agents are infiltrated into Greece.

27. The Greeks probably look on partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia as the ideal solution to the problem. They are apprehensive of possible Yugoslav or Italian domination of the country, and would probably attempt to occupy Northern Epirus in the event of military action in the area, such as a Yugoslav invasion of Albania. For the present, in the absence of Allied assurances against possible Italian or Yugoslav domination of Albania, Greece probably prefers continuation of the status quo, at least so long as the Hoxha regime does not revive full scale support to the Greek guerrillas.

28. Greece, like Italy and Yugoslavia, is attempting to further its policy through the use of Albanian refugees. Those in Greece are primarily from southern Albania and are apparently concentrated in camps along the Albanian border. The Greek government does not permit them to emigrate or to become Greek citizens. Some of those in the camp at Iannina are reported to be formed into military units, intended for eventual use in southern Albania.

Yugoslav interests.

29. Yugoslavia, and before it Serbia and Montenegro, has always opposed the principle of an independent Albania. Following

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World War I, Yugoslavia occupied northern Albania and did not withdraw until 1921. In 1926, Yugoslavia finally accepted the Albanian frontier as delineated in 1913. Until the outbreak of World War II, Italian domination of Albania prevented Yugoslavia from exercising any influence.

30. This situation changed radically during World War II when Tito, through Albanian Communists, managed to obtain control of the Albanian National Liberation Movement. Tito's control was exercised largely through emissaries attached to the headquarters of the Albanian Army of National Liberation, and, from 1944 to 1948, Albania was a puppet of Yugoslavia. In 1948, Hoxha was able to extricate Albania from its ties with Yugoslavia because of the Tito-Cominform rift.

31. Since 1948, Tito has ostensibly championed the principle of an independent, sovereign Albania and has condemned Greek territorial claims and alleged Greek proposals for the partition of Albania between Greece and Yugoslavia. In the past several months, Yugoslav propaganda has also charged Italy with encouraging the plans of Albanian exiles for an "ethnic" Albania which would include the Yugoslav provinces of Kosovo and Metohiya, both populated chiefly by Albanians. Tito's actual intentions appear to be the eventual creation of an anti-Stalinist, pro-Tito regime in Albania and a return to the status of 1944-1948. It was

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apparently to this end that the "League of Albanian Political Refugees in Yugoslavia" was formed in May 1951. At the same time, however, Yugoslav spokesmen have at various times expressed the fear that any substantial efforts to overthrow the Hoxha regime might be taken by the USSR as a pretext for military action against Yugoslavia.

THE POSSIBILITY OF A SETTLEMENT

32. The existence of Albania as a sovereign state has in the past always depended upon the desires of a stronger power. Although all three of Albania's neighbors would presumably wish to see the eventual liquidation of the present regime in Albania, their interests are incompatible. The policy of each country since the geographic isolation of Albania from the Soviet orbit in 1948 has been directed at establishing a position from which it could profit in the event of the overthrow of the Hoxha regime. As a result, each country has been suspicious of the moves of the others and has sought to counter them. One result of this has been the diffusion of resistance efforts within Albania which has contributed greatly to their ineffectiveness.

33. Without the intervention of the Western powers, it is unlikely that the rivalry of Albania's neighbors can be ended. So long as this rivalry exists, not only will the possibility of

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effective military cooperation between Italy, Yugoslavia and Greece be limited, but also the possibility of effective resistance within Albania will remain slight. Furthermore, if the rivalry persists and if the Hoxha regime should fall, there would be danger of a clash among the rivals. Assurances by the Western powers that Albania would be established as an independent and sovereign state after the fall of the Hoxha regime might reduce the rivalry between Italy and Yugoslavia.

34. Because of its claims to "Northern Epirus," which would be thwarted in the event of Western recognition of a new Albanian regime, Greece would find it more difficult to agree to such a solution. Also, the Greeks would not countenance a pro-Italian or pro-Yugoslav regime and would, therefore, probably demand Allied assurances against Yugoslav and Italian aspirations in Albania. Greece would probably be more amenable to such a solution if it could obtain Yugoslav assurances on Aegean Macedonia and a British promise of the eventual return of Cyprus to Greece.

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